

## Understanding Bullying from a Multi-disciplinary Bullying Perspective and What to do Next

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- Bullying is such a contentious issue in which all schools face because of how it affects not only the individual (whether a victim or bully), but also peers/bystanders, parents, families and even the community.
- Ways in which we can understand how bullying occurs are through the traditional visible as well as non-traditional means by nature. When we discuss:

### **Traditional**

- physical, name calling

### **Covert bullying/Indirect bullying**

- Lying and spreading rumors
- Negative facial or physical gestures, menacing or contemptuous looks
- Playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate
- Mimicking unkindly
- Encouraging others to socially exclude someone
- Damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance.

### **Cyberbullying**

- Overt or covert behaviors' via digital technologies.
- Mobile phones, defamatory personal website; deliberately excluding from social networking spaces.
- Cyberbullying can happen at any time, in public or in private. Sometimes only known to the target and the person bullying.
- Need to understand the definitions of bullying. By & large bullying is when someone or a group of people with more power repeatedly and intentionally causes hurt or harm to another person or group of people who feel helpless to respond.
- Bullying can continue over time, is often hidden from adults and will probably continue if no action is taken.
- One must also understand that an isolated incident of bullying occurs BUT, where individuals or a group set out to **create a situation** where the victim ends up getting blamed, but this may be part of a plan to discredit a targeted person (or group).
- The victim is blamed for starting the fight and bullies even pose as victims themselves.
- It is where they try to deflect punishment and maintain their hidden status as bullies.
- SO IS ALL ABOUT INTENTION!!!

**So the power element remains regarding the forms of bullying, but is EQUALLY important to understand the nature of WHY bullying occurs rather than just HOW it occurs and also from a multidisciplinary perspective and how this affects the way young people interact with one another.**

**Studies from Social Psychological Perspective – discusses broadly 3 perspectives:-**

(a) Power – based Perspective:

A model associated with wellbeing of the perpetrator and explaining bullying as a desire for power and control – is ALSO on a social psychological concept.

- Typically bullies display mannerisms as ‘aggressive, dominating, non-empathetic, physically strong’ with a “positive attitude towards an instrumental violence and favorable self-image having little or no empathy towards victims” (Hoover and Juul, 1993 in Ma et al 2001:261).
- So here the bully is heartless with no form of remorse; not willing to accept any responsibility and instead blame the victims – yet the omits to include the social environment and socio-economic environment in any great depth and how they affect the causes for the individual to bully.

(b) Social – Learning Perspective:

Perspective identifies a correlation between the abused bullies; where often the perpetrator has low self-esteem and social communication skills and is influenced by peers to bully. Many also fail to make friends or positive relationships.

- Much of the research on this perspective (Oliver et al, 1994; Sullivan et al, 2005), examine the upbringing of the child to help explain how the child’s life and character is formed and shaped by family values and lifestyles – in addition include family structure in terms of financial and social problems, emotional environment, lack of family structure, social isolation; parental conflict and poor child management skills, all contribute towards shaping the bully.
- Much of the research on this perspective (Oliver et al 1994; Sullivan et al 2005), examine the upbringing of the child to help explain how the child’s life and character is formed and shaped by family values and lifestyles – in addition include family structure in terms of financial structure; social isolation; parental conflict and poor child management skills all contribute towards shaping the bully.
- Studies also argue that such behavior also reinforces aggression. Over controlling parents and those that neglect, those that fail to reward good deeds and those that spoil – contribute to bullying.
- Missing from this perspective is that it suggests that the individual is consistently surrounded by negative behaviour and fail to examine what positive and progressive anti-bullying support and preventative measures are offered by schools.

(c) Mind – Skills Perspective:

Where more emphasis is placed upon ‘intention’, studies skills, have suggested that the individual skillfully exercise their minds to manipulate and control victims.

- A conflict arises here where some suggest the perpetrator lacks basic social and understanding skills, but others disagree (Sutton, et al 1999) and believe the bully possess sharp social cognitive and mind skills – able to control the bullying situation and how the victim will react – thus getting maximum satisfaction by inflicting mass suffering.
- Research on this perspective falls short on associating varied behavior of young people who bully.
- Not all perpetrators fit this particular framework and what is missing are linking this theory with peer behavior- whether bystanders accept or reject such bullying behavior – as influence of peers is crucial to explaining bullying and how hegemonic masculinity is played out.

All 3 theories overlap with one another and make positive contributions towards explaining bullying behavior – but much more on an individual perspective and fail to emphasize in detail how important social factors are and they influence bullying.

***Studies from Sociological Perspective identify four broad perspectives....***

Sociological studies tend to locate the theory of bullying through structural and socio-economic factors from the perpetrators home, neighborhood, community environment and school.

But studies use delinquent behavior as opposed to terming it as 'bullying' directly.

BUT... 'Bullying' behavior **IS** part of the continuing nature that involves delinquency and delinquent behavior. **Four theories apply:**

(a) Social Control Theory:

A major pioneer of this perspective is Hirschi, who developed and applied social control theory to delinquency and argues that youth who have strong bonds in society are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior. This social control theory can be linked to 4 principle elements:

- (i) Positive interactions in the schools – especially in the classroom, look into the positive attitudes and practices of the teacher and how the classroom is managed influencing how much bullying occurs.
- (ii) School commitment to conventional activities – Hirschi agrees that schools that commit to, for eg, attendance and engaging in community activity helps reduce bullying as this allows young people to become more involved and foster more positive attitude and behavior – inconsistent to delinquent behavior (Espealage and Swearer, 2009; 153).
- (iii) The actual involvement with conventional activities especially extra-curricular activities – help reduce bullying as young people are less likely to display problematic behaviors in middle-high school.
- (iv) Belief in conventional values. Essentially Hirschi believes young people follow conventional rules of good behavior – would be less likely to commit delinquent behavior – as it promotes the need for a positive and healthy relationship with adults, for eg, teachers, parents and the school.

SO, social control theory acts more as a preventative theory as theory explains where bullying occurs and is allowed to continue. BUT theory is limited – only uses a singular theory- need to combine all theories to explain why bullying occurs. Further, social control does not single handedly reduce delinquent behavior- especially relationship with peers.

(b) Social Disorganisation Perspective:

Theory explores and examines impoverished social economic and social conditions that limits a community's ability to control or supervise adolescent behavior (Espealage and Swearer, 2009; 155).

- Stewart (2003), talks about low economic status; ethnic heterogeneity and high residential mobility as 3 main structural factors that contribute towards the disruption in the home, and to an extent community cohesion and organization.

- Also suggests that young people from socially disadvantaged inner city neighborhood are at more risk of being victimized as opposed to those from affluent homes and communities.
- Other researchers disagree as little is known about the actual potential application of social disorganization theory to bullying behavior and victimization.
- However, it is credible to argue that peer support, collective efforts by the community – including neighborhoods and schools help to reduce bullying/perpetration and victimization. Hence a need for positive school ethos.

(c) Social Ecological Perspective

Explaining bullying via environmental factors and how this influences bullying behaviour examining social environment and socio-economic status and culture (Andrews, 1985 in Espealage and Swearer, 2009; 155).

- Research on neighborhood disadvantage is limited compared to other sociological research on explaining bullying, but research focuses upon issues such as extent of adult criminality and how this influences and affects young people.
- A central feature includes looking at rates of unemployment, cultural diversity; population turnover; changes in the structure of the job market, family composition e.g., prevalence of single-parent families on low income and impact of urban renewal and other housing policies.
- Research on this perspective agree that the higher the level of informal control, (i.e. social), higher the neighborhood rates of pro-social competence and involvement with friends (i.e. social integration), the lower the neighborhood rates of problem behavior (Eliott et al, 1996; 414) –
- Hence, linking back with the social disorganization theory –
- Theory is weak in that it is under developed and does not explore relationship between pupils behavior in schools and that working class neighborhood tend to rely more on one another as opposed to affluent neighborhoods.

But evidence still suggests is a strong correlation between neighborhood environment and young people's behavior, particularly in schools e.g., family and community attitudes towards certain areas and level of violence in schools, especially indicating more exist in urban rather than rural schools.

(d) Masculinity Perspectives

Hegemonic masculinity is the most dominant form of masculinity and therefore the most relevant theory. Four groups fall under the main component of Hegemonic Masculinity and reflect the overall 'gender order' and practice:

- (i) Hegemonic;
- (ii) Subordinate;
- (iii) Marginalized;
- (iv) Complicit Masculinity.

- Hegemonic masculinity is not fixed per se, and continually changes and reinvents itself around issues such as physical strength, adventurousness, emotional neutrality, assertiveness and individuality.
- Hegemonic masculinity ultimately revolves around what society expects and regarding behavior what is acceptable for boys and girls.

- Many studies, but particularly Jo Goodey (1997) discusses that verbal and physical aggressiveness amongst males is accepted by society as part of the male bravado and whilst things are changing- still centrally seen as uncouth and unacceptable behavior among girls.
- Gender stereotyping are formed by society and societal norms and ultimately that society expects boys to be tough and 'NOT CRY'.
- Goodey theorizes that the 'criminal man' and links it to bullying as she suggests that male adolescents who bully and engage in anti-social behavior are likely to offend later in life. Her main point is that the notion of the 'Fearless male' is rather unhelpful as it suggests that boys should keep their bullying ordeals to themselves, not cry, be brave and this links to the concept of hegemonic masculinity.
- Goodey suggests that boys should be able to express their emotions without fear of tarnishing their masculine identity. Thus, this can help explain why boys after a certain age (10+) tend to under-report their victimization.
- Underreporting in general is a major social problems schools face worldwide! There are more explanations to hegemonic masculinity – but ultimately, these are the main points.

Hence, are **needs for viewing psychological perspectives to explaining bullying**, but **by applying sociological perspectives of bullying** – the **4 theories fundamentally contribute to explaining how the social environment impacts upon bullying behavior and how it is allowed to continue.....**also, we must understand again, **use of explaining bullying focus on delinquent behavior**, but **delinquent behavior is part of a continuum action that involves bullying**.

Therefore, agreeing with authors such as Hamarus & Kaikkonen (2002), is a further **need to explain WHY bullying essentially occurs by considering social psychological as well as sociological perspectives** as it also better informs and gives broader anti-bullying prevention and intervention measures.

### ***What to do Next***

Ultimately, need a broad mixture of preventative and intervention methods.

Each school is different and no preventative measure is a one fit all, but rather, schools need to manipulate the measures to fit the needs of their school.

As presented exploring social psychological perspectives to bullying – enables for broader preventative measures through four means as well as a traditional response:

- (i) Holistic;
- (ii) Restorative;
- (iii) Whole School Approach;
- (iv) Increase of social and emotional learning;
- (v) Immediate Sanctioning.

Holistic approaches tend to occur among schools once the bullying incident has occurred, but developing one embedded within the school curriculum, thus creating more potential for an effective prevention and response creating a safer and happier environment- as training and teaching using social and emotional learning.

- BUT....immediate sanctioning required as an immediate action to an incident or reported incident of bullying.

A restorative approach assists especially where mediation is concerned and the use of Whole School Approach helps improve the ethos of the school.

- Initiatives involving teaching, parents, students can be set up where all agree to the main problem of the school and considering the psychological and social factors of the school.
- Mediation whether among peers and/or adults also helps to tune into children and young people's social and emotional awareness and encourages positive behavior.
- Restorative approaches also involve exploring relationship between the victim and bully and an adult facilitating a healing and restorative process among the two individuals, depending upon the severity of the case. This helps curb bullying problems- but not eradicate it on its own.
- Counseling and educating, through the use of social and emotional learning has been viewed in research to be a positive preventative tool as teaching young people to become emotionally literate helps assist in equipping students to behave in alternate ways, rather than from creating violent and dysfunctional relationships (Bocchino 1999; Elliotts and Faupel 1997; Miller 2001; Roffey, 2008).

*In discussion with young people from schools and youth group workshops and of ages both in the UK and US, main findings are:*

- Need for improved communication between young people and adults;
- An improved, broader anti-bullying education embedded within the curriculum is key as it allows teachers to understand pupils and vice versa;
- BUT.... is a NEED for long term and consistent training and education in order for this to be achieved.
- Young people expressed in their own ways a need to be listened to, a broader scheme would give young people a platform to air their views and respond;
- Develop and improve upon role of the Upstander and empowerment work - as the role of peers **IS** the way forward. Statistics reveal that Upstander intervention from a bullying incident can stop the bullying from continuing within 10 seconds of it happening;
- It's cool to bully! Major finding from presentation work done with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in a school in Brooklyn, during interactive game, this attitude in the school was a major finding. JaanaJuvonen, Psychologist, UCLA conducted study in 11 schools in L.A. Nearly 2,000 students admitted that "The ones who are 'cool', bully and the ones who bully more are seen as 'cool'";
- With the changing social ethos of the school, - a positive ethos helps to reduce bullying;
- Can be achieved by putting correct amount of time and hours in;

**Two organizations that embody these principles:**

**ACTION AGAINST BULLYING (AAB) & BULLYING INTERVENTION GROUP (BIG)**

**Action Against Bullying**

Action Against Bullying formed in 2013 essentially focuses and serves for effective training for teachers and guidance counselors in the form of training modules.

- Training can be offered online or in schools in half or full day workshops;
- Modules utilize research expertise and academic background from social psychological and socio-economical perspective – allows for fuller and broader training;

- Use of social and emotional learning;
- Teachers and guidance counsellors trained to impart anti-bullying preventative methods that use holisticwhole school approach and restorative measures;
- Each module includes brief academic background and book to enrich understanding;
- Diverse modules that deal with issues from Cyberbullying, what IS bullying (definition), multicultural diversity through to what latest research suggests, such as promoting group exercise and healthy eating is proven to reduce school bullying;

### **Bullying Intervention Group**

- Established in 2011 by 3 highly experienced Anti-Bullying consultants with over 15 years each in bullying prevention work and trained over 1000's of young people in schools;
- AAB is in partnership with BIG;
- All were regional directors of ABA (Anti-Bullying Alliance), till a change of government;
- BIG came about as a result of demand by schools and award scheme allows schools to be awarded for best anti-bullying practice;
- BIG is an online course and nationally recognized and accredited by the Educational Dept., as an additional qualification for teachers;
- Schools that achieve the award are provided with resources, lesson plans, research updates, regular data analysis and continual training/professional development;
- BIG has been sponsored by some highly reputable organizations for eg, Show Racism the Red Card and endorsed by LA and celebrities such as Esther Ransen (also president of Child Line);
- BIG wants course implemented in schools in the US and as consultant and specialist, under AAB, would deliver professional training in schools;
- Over 1,000 schools have signed up for the award from UK, Ireland, Wales and a few from Brussels;
- A few statistics from regular data by 10,500 pupils have resulted in, for e.g., – Cyberbullying = halved; Prejudice-driven bullying = significantly reduced;

FINALLY, pupils from schools who have signed up with BIG award have been 3 times more likely to say that if/when have reported cases of bullying, have received a good outcome!!!

In keeping with the whole notion of a positive school ethos, would like to end on this quote:

“Great minds discuss ideas;  
Average minds discuss events;  
Small minds discuss people!!!”

~Eleanor Roosevelt